

Shipwreck

Timber screeched. Da mast skirled. Men scuttled.

Dey wir dangerously closs tae a jagged shoreline. Da light o da mune bretched da black sky as strong winds hammered da deck o Torvik Eriksson's langship, 'Discovery'. A sudden bolt o lightnin crashed against da broken boom, causin peerie fires ta wash ower da tattered sails. A muckle wave crunched half o da boo anunder its dark depths. Torvik waatched da raven sail burn. He prayed fir dir deliverance. Da waatchman pointed forrard, wavin his airms frantically. Den Torvik saa it: a vast waa o waater descendin apo dem. Lik a faaen laef, da boat wis carelessly cast aside, da men scattered inta da unfathomable joob; some wir gaspin fir braeth, idders wir grabbin dir necks wi terrified fury.

Torvik waatched impotently as da ship groaned an dived an sank.

Loki himsel seemed to be draggin Torvik doon ta da boddim, bit he desperately resisted da icy whisper o death, forcin himsel upwards. He burst da surface o da maelstrom, his lungs heavin. Da wind wis high an da moon's white rays wir dartin across da rocky shores afore im. He roared, tryin ta attract da attention o his remainin comrades. Lik birsie fish dey struggled fir da shoreline, aa da while bein battered be da sea.

A man yalled and pointed ta da eastard. Da fiord wis spittin oot its slaverin tongue, desperate ta lap up Torvik and his men. Da Chieftain pounded da waves, gradually nearin da shore. Aa roond im dead boadies bobbed ta da surface, lik ancient driftwid.

He heard screams as da waek and da tired wir sweepit below da micht o Aegir's deadly aquatic carpet. Torvik tumbled an turned an swittled underneath da surface. Streaks o grey munelicht flowed across frosted shaalls o flesh an bon. He closed his een.

Saat. Saat, saat and saat. Torvik couldna tell if it wis da seawaater sloshin aboot in his mooth, or if it wis da blood weepin fae his wounds. He appeared ta be on a muckle, broon skerry. Dey must hiv rekked da shore. He muttered his thanks ta da Gods.

Sittin up, he tried ta git waarmth coorsing through his limbs again, bit fell forrard akkwardly. He felt a cowld grainy texture underneath his fingernails. Saand. At last, somethin he recognised. Risin wi difficulty, he scanned his surroondins; immediately, his gaze met a figure waalkin towards him. His airm darted instinctively fir his axe, onnly ta meet da cowld ledder o his belt. Wi a chill tae his hert, he realised he wis defenceless.

Da figure was peerie, nearly crooked, and waalked in a slow, unpurposeful wye. Da Chieftain could see innocence, an trust, fae athin da craiter's een. A deevilish smirk cut across Torvik's face, as he ootstretched an airm ta da stranger. Torvik gripped his haand, an stood up. He nodded a thanks, bit da man joost waalked awaa. He, an twartree idders, wir soon busy draggin survivors ta da shore, as if dey wir gadderin up da remains fae a game o Hnefatafl. A good crew Torvik hid pickit. Twa shadowy figures wir draggin a crate ta da beach, brakkin it oppen. In it, he could see da glint o axe an armour. Anidder blessin. He grumbled ta da idders, an grabbed some gear.

Da rescuer returned to Torvik. Utterin muffled grunts, he pat on da Chieftain's sodden tunic, intendin him ta follow. Da remains o da group, alang wi dir saviours, descended trow da darkness, lik siller ghost-lik wisps.

Dey crossed onta black, damp girse, dat squelched under Torvik's boots. Da horizon o da laandscape afore dem, fae whit dey could mak oot in da gloor, wis rough an hilly. Alien, white baests littered da horizon an da laand aroond dem, payin little heed ta da passers by.

Da locals waalked trow da night in a wheer, towless wye, as if dey hid nivver seen trow a herd day's wark or cleaved da tender neck o a muckle tree.

Someen pointed forrard: an orange glim oozed ida sky. It wis a settlement, Torvik assumed. Da slick tendrils of dawn crept ower da roofs o a haep o ston biggins. A muckle fire burned ida middle o it aa, wi da hooses poseetioned roond it. Faerful weeminfok lay crooched in front of a burn, scrubbin awaa at clay bowls. Aa da natives cam ta dir feet cautiously, an timidly approched dir guests. Torvik's saviour addressed dem, his speech a rumble o rasps an hoasts. Den he turned ta face da Chieftain an da rest o his men, openin his haands an smilin. A flicker o intent simmered ower Torvik's birs face, a glimpse o mild peety in his een.

“Bind up the women. Slay the rest of these pitiful whelps.”

A wave o yallin and shoutin erupted, mufflin da ensuin screams o terror. Torvik's waar baand sprinted forward. Iron rose an fell chaotically. Torvik himsel cast doon da village elder, meetin da thick bon o his neck wi da steel o his sword.

Da tattered raven banner wis raised apo da mutilated remains o da settlement. Gazin at his bloodied blade, Torvik suddenly realised hoo clossly da hilt resembled da shore o his new hommlaand – slim, elongated, belligerent.

He roared da place's name; possessed it wi da word: 'Hjaltland!'

